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# LONDON VESTRIES,

AND THEIR

## SANITARY WORK:

ARE THEY WILLING AND ABLE TO DO IT?  
AND MAY THEY BE TRUSTED IN THE  
FACE OF A SEVERE EPIDEMIC?

BEING

A SPEECH DELIVERED AUGUST 8TH, 1865, AT A MEETING OF  
THE VESTRY OF ST. GEORGE-THE-MARTYR, SOUTHWARK.

BY

W. RENDLE,

VESTRYMAN, AND LATE THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH OF THE PARISH; HONORARY MEMBER  
AND A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH, ETC.

*[Reprinted from the 'South London Journal.']*

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to Mr Ferguson B.A.

with W. Randle's reports -

## TO THE READER.

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It may be thought, as the speech here republished refers to but one parish in London, that it scarcely bears out the title. But in this case, directly or indirectly, *ex uno disce omnes*; and as from sad experience the conditions of local invitation to Fever are known to be the conditions of invitation to Cholera also, the second and third clauses of the title may be considered as more or less completely answered. The records of the Fever Hospital, and the letters of Dr. Jeaffreson and others to the 'Times,' tell of fever, coming usually (and occasionally in something like shoals) from the same places, year after year. The general complaint is that the obstructive and self-interested power in the London Vestries is immense and almost irresistible; and that so the better and unfortunately weaker element is usually swamped, and that the conditions here complained of naturally follow. I wish, however, to give the Vestries the advantage of the testimony of our very highest authority. Mr. Simon says, "My own seven years' experience in the service of a local sanitary authority has given me a strong belief in the general disposition of such authorities to exert themselves efficiently against the causes of premature death, when but once they have become fully and publicly informed of the existence and fatality of such causes. Fully informed, I say; because the non-removal of evils which occasion so much human misery commonly depends much less on the supineness of the local authority, as its primary cause, than on the absence of local consciousness as to the real facts of the case. Publicly informed, I say; because local sanitary authorities, exercising their powers virtually without control, and being, like individual men, not incapable of indolence and

error, peculiarly require that their fulfilment of very important duties should be subject to public criticism. Failing this check, it is unquestionable that the existing constitution of such authorities must sometimes endanger the objects for which they are constituted. Elected on the principle of being the representatives of rate-payers, the members are sometimes a little apt to forget that, for sanitary purposes, they are also the appointed guardians of masses of human beings whose lives are at stake in the business. They do not always recollect that the interests of life are at least as sacred as the interests of wealth. And this danger especially deserves to be guarded against; for it has not unfrequently happened that local owners of low house property," and others, "have procured themselves to be elected members of sanitary boards with a view to the protection of their own unworthy interest, by a systematic resistance to sanitary improvement."\* In mitigation of an unfavorable judgment in the case of my own parish, let me also mention that the poorest people are very numerous there (our annual poor-rates are not far from £30,000); that fortunes are very scarce; that people well-to-do are so only by hard work; and that large numbers who contribute are but a few steps above the paupers. Thus it appears difficult among us to encourage a real and liberal sanitary improvement. Of course we feel, when the rich pay only a little out of their abundance to the poor-rates, and we in many instances give like the widow in the Gospel, that if this could be mended, our hearts and our pockets would be more open to the poor and to their sanitary and social welfare. This, however, acts as an excuse to the mean-spirited and short-sighted only, because it must be obvious to all that it would be cheaper to keep a district of poor people healthy than unhealthy. I will only add further that after a most searching discussion upon this statement at a more recent meeting of Vestry, I hold to its absolute truthfulness in every important particular.

\* Pages xliii and xliv, "Papers relating to the Sanitary State of the People of England," 1858.



# LONDON VESTRIES,

AND THEIR

## SANITARY WORK.

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VESTRY OF ST. GEORGE-THE-MARTYR, SOUTHWARK.

PROPOSED IMPROVED SANITARY ARRANGEMENTS.

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MR. RENDLE made the following statement :—As we are a body appointed chiefly for sanitary and similar purposes, the question of fever is of the highest importance to us, and demands the most patient investigation. The presence of this disease continuously or to any extent in a district is, in the opinion of all the highest authorities, a proof of very great evils, which all concur in thinking more or less removable. A proof also that the particular locality is unhealthy in every sense. The recent notice from the Privy Council as to preventive measures, couples cholera and typhus together. The continued presence of fever tells of causes which aid in producing other diseases and in sapping the stamina of all within reach of the fever poisons. The great French physician, contemplating what he saw in the Crimea, was not far wrong when he said it could be produced or destroyed at will. The question for us is, having a large power, which may be increased if we wish it, have we the will to try? I cannot imagine in such an inquiry as this, which must, if it succeeds at all, be for the public benefit, and cannot by any chance wrong any one, that there should be any cause for party feeling or for anger. If we discuss it calmly and with judgment we shall better understand the conditions which give rise to fever and many accompanying evils in our locality—how much of the causes we may, and how much we may not, remove. Unhappily, we in this parish are always among the heaviest afflicted. In five years we

have had 400 deaths from fever ; in the two last cholera epidemics 1600 from cholera or diarrhœa. But in whatever locality fever lurks, it points to nearly the same causes which we shall have to investigate. In times past I may personally have felt hurt at the treatment I have received ; but that is all past. I have now not the least animus against any, and I will work with any who will work with me for a hearty improvement in our unwholesome districts. I only endeavour with what light I have to point out facts, and to draw from them principles for a better action. It may suit the opponents of sanitary action, to connect this with some supposed personal prejudices. I have, in common with others, I hope, a prejudice against dirt harboured in and about houses ; I would have money spent and the law put in force, to abate this in a reasonable but effectual manner. I have a dislike to impure water and filthy water-butts for others as well as for myself ; and a further dislike to no water supply at all ; and you must permit me to tell you where such defects are, without calling my sincerity in question ; and you must permit me to tell you this openly and not privately, for the evil is too wide-spread—too great for our small peddling agency to amend it. If all that I advocate is in itself good, I cannot intend much harm to any one. If it is not good, why does not some one enter the lists and prove it so, instead of calumniating me ? Abusing me will not find water, or make it sweet where it is foul. I dislike overcrowding ; but I would not, as my calumniators say, turn swarms of people into the street, knowing, as I do, that there is a scarcity of homes for the poor. I would empty and cleanse only a dangerous house like this 75, Webber Row, and do it quickly, so as to let the landlord have his rent and the people their home again. I would not allow people to breed pestilence, if I could help it ; and I would nip it in the bud if I could find it. The duty of the higher to the lower people has been too long ignored, and all manner of contrivances, especially under the Poor Law, and in most parish managements, have been discovered and practised to shift off the responsibilities of the poor altogether or on to others. So much has this spirit grown up in us that it now to many seems strangely unnatural to be called upon to think for or to act much on behalf of poor, ignorant, and bad people. Not long since all London was startled at the immense liberality of a great merchant, who gave,



so it was said, £150,000 to make wholesome dwellings for the poor of London, which is acknowledged to be the great want of London; but now we get nearer and nearer to the real working of the scheme connected with this gift, it looks more and more like a scheme intended to pay a fair interest for money, not for the poorest at all, but for those only who are good and clean, and well-to-do enough to be able to pay the necessary interest for the money. This is how it looks to me and to many others. I hope I may be mistaken. I see in it the same prejudices which ever ignore the poorest and most ignorant of all. The spirit of our growing legislation strongly tends to the better way. The collected Parliament of the whole nation is far ahead of local bodies in the matter of caring for poor people. Expressions are now and then heard in this Vestry, and are received with applause by some, to the effect that the poor are too bad to be mended, too filthy to be taught cleanliness; as if that was a state of things, if it were true, which it is not, to be pleased with and proud of. I hope it is always possible in deliberative bodies to point out evils and to suggest remedies without being drawn continuously into a general squabble. I hope it is possible to differ without personal offence. My friends with whom I act desire only a true and honest improvement; we think it is worth some money to attempt it; and in pressing for this as we do, and shall, we do not desire to step upon any one's toes more than we can help. But then mere obstructiveness and selfishness must get out of the way. We hope always to show gentlemanly conduct, but we must be permitted an honest and plain spirit of criticism. That my words may be clear and open afterwards to inspection, I this time, once for all, have written what I shall say to you, and I shall say it exactly as I shall print it. In this way, if need be, the public can judge between us; by reading, if they care to do so, the very words put before you. I have been sent here by the whole, that is by all the three districts, of this large parish, and this unsolicited by me, and in my absence. I am naturally very proud of this; but it was apparently upon the express ground that I am a steady and uncompromising advocate of a real sanitary and social improvement; and, as shown in my letters and statements published with my name, as one thoroughly discontented with the present imperfect state of the sanitary laws and the still more imperfect mode

of administering them. This being so, I am, as I think, bound to speak, and you, knowing all this, are bound to admit from me an honest and earnest criticism, which is or should be the very conscience of a deliberative body speaking out. Providence is often mentioned in this place in connection with this question. I must notice it. Without hearty work how can we call upon Providence for help. He knows our motives, and it is of course a mockery to call upon Him if we have within us no earnestness for the work, and no meaning that it shall succeed. The people who so generally suffer from sanitary misarrangements must not be abused, as they so often are, as filthy, incorrigible, and unfit to be helped. There is an abundance of good to work upon and with, if we only give them line upon line of information, and a kindly and continuous aid to help themselves. Look at the case before us, 75, Webber Row. Here is a poor woman with a husband and six children, in no way related to the disgusting and afflicted people upstairs: this woman, when their daughter was taken away with fever, waited upon the sick when no one else could be found to do so. This is common among the poor, as I well know; and I therefore ask your favorable and kindly consideration for this class of people. The resolution before you speaks of this and similar cases, and of defects both in law and management in connection with them. Not long since a question as to fever in this parish, and incidentally of others, was put to a gentleman of knowledge and position unconnected with us—the resident physician of the Fever Hospital. I will read his answer to you:

“London Fever Hospital;

*April 12th, 1865.*

“DEAR SIR,—The number of fever cases sent from your parish to this hospital from July 29th to December 31st, 1864, was 183, a considerably larger number than that sent in the same period from any other London parish or union. The fact most prominent in relation to these cases was that they came continuously month by month from the same buildings, or building even. On inquiry this fact was sufficiently explained on my learning that houses from which five, six, seven, and even eight typhus cases had been sent here, still remained utterly unregarded by the sanitary authorities, and allowed to remain overcrowded and filthy in the extreme. I



also found that families who had been frightened from homes from having lost relatives from fever in them, had had their places quickly supplied by fresh candidates for typhus, who entered infected rooms without even the forms of cleansing having been gone through. If infected houses were scrubbed and limewashed from top to bottom, and kept empty afterwards for not less than ten days only, there is no doubt that they would become safe habitations, providing decent sanitary regulations were subsequently enforced. Sanitary inspectors should keep a close watch over the books which show the localities from whence fever cases are removed here, and on the occurrence of even one case have the spot thoroughly investigated, and, if necessary, emptied, repaired, and cleansed. By such means I have not a doubt that at least 50 per cent. of the typhus cases and typhus mortality might be prevented. The spots in London from which patients are sent here are so limited in area, though widely yet not diffusely spread, that I have perfect confidence that fairly energetic sanitary measures would be fully competent to meet the main evil.

“ I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

“ H. JEAFFRESON, M.B.”

Corroborating the general points, hear what Dr. Murchison says :—“ An abundant supply of fresh air is not only the best means for preventing the generation of typhus, but it is the surest safeguard against its propagation to the attendants on the sick and to other persons. The truth of this statement has been already so fully established, that it is needless to enlarge upon it. But as this desideratum is not always attainable in the houses of the poor, the infected persons ought to be isolated, and, if possible, removed at once to an hospital. At the same time the house should undergo a thorough cleansing and ventilation, the inhabitants should be reduced in number, their clothes washed, and every means taken to ensure personal cleanliness.” Again, in the same book, read this :—“ We should have little difficulty in pointing out above a hundred houses where a single case of fever has occurred, where the patient has been speedily removed, and where there has been no recurrence ; but we should hardly find five houses in all the closes of the old town (Edinburgh) in which a patient in fever has lain during the

whole or even half the disease, and in which other cases have not speedily shown themselves." After such evidence as this I defy any who have authority or influence in such matters to be the advocates of a no-action policy, and at the same time to keep their consciences comfortable. Nearly a hundred years ago a sensible man wrote these words:—"If any person will take the trouble to stand in the hot sun and look on his own shadow on a white-plastered wall, he will easily perceive that his whole body is a smoking dunghill, with a vapour exhaling from every part of it. This vapour is subtle, acrid, and offensive to the smell. If retained in the body it becomes morbid, but if reabsorbed highly deleterious. If a number of persons, therefore, are long confined in any close place not properly ventilated, so as to inspire and swallow with their spittle the vapours of each, they must soon feel its bad effects. Bad provisions and gloomy thoughts will add to their misery, and soon breed the seminum of a pestilential fever, dangerous not only to themselves but also to every person who visits them or even communicates with them at second hand." Connected with this, what are our duties according to the law we have engaged to administer? We are "to know of the existence of diseases—more especially epidemics—of the causes which originate and maintain such diseases; and we are to know of the most efficacious mode of checking or preventing the spread of them" (p. 90, Woolrych). However some may differ from the letter I have read, as to this parish, from personal inspection and from long knowledge I can affirm that it is in every essential particular true, and it cannot be disputed upon the basis of any correct knowledge or motive. If we would do our duty we must calmly consider it, and as quickly as possible devise means to carry out its recommendations. This case of 75, Webber Row, which is before us, is important in this, that it is a type of numerous places neglected, in and from which typhus is bred and propagated. I have seen and traced plenty of it. In July 29th last year a case was received into the Fever Hospital from Langsdowne Place (not the first, I believe, but I go no further back in my investigations). This July case was from No. 11. In August cases were taken from Nos. 35, 37, 38, and 39. In September from Nos. 13, 18, 19, 31, 44, and 45. In October from No. 4. In December from Nos. 12 and 21. In January from No. 16. In



February from No. 25. In March from Nos. 36 and 22. It did not altogether leave these houses, for in many it paid a second and succeeding visits, and the cases must have remained, at least some of them, some time in the houses before they were removed to the hospital. I am not telling you half, for in April, May, and June, 130 cases of typhus had been admitted into the workhouse, and, as the place was not suitable for the disease, it was got rid of and no more cases were admitted; not, however, before 15 inmates had been attacked, some of whom died. Henry Street, Kent Street—here also, as it generally does when neglected, the cases passed from house to house until it had visited 13, out of which 31 cases, chiefly the worst, no doubt, were sent to the Fever Hospital. We may naturally suppose that those sent to the hospital were the worst, and that many others recovered at home or dispersed themselves, and spread the disease wherever they went. In this way one neglectful parish may become a curse to its people and to neighbouring parishes. I have seen many instances of this. I am only giving you specimens; you must search the books for yourselves to find the whole of the cases, and their sad details. It appears quite evident to the investigator that this fever begins and spreads in the same house, to other houses, and to all the neighbourhood, and that other infectious diseases are like it. You will see by Langsdowne Place, by Henry Street, and by other places recorded in our books, and in the books of the Fever Hospital, that house after house was attacked during many months, during which time it frequently revisited the same house. It is noteworthy that the chief causes were among the poorest, who are especially, according to law, more or less under the care of the Vestry and the Guardians, and it rarely extended to cleaner, opener, and better-fed districts. One consideration, too, which may render our task easy, is that the houses which appear pre-eminently as fever nests, *ab initio* as it were, are few, so that the emptying and cleansing these at the first appearance of an outbreak of typhus would entail no privation and no suffering on the inhabitants, and would probably destroy the infectious disease in its seed state. And as we have at last to remove them when they become bad enough and numerous enough, it would seem to commend itself to kindly sensible persons that it would be better to do it at first with the few, than at last by the force



of an irresistible necessity with the many. In the case referred to the medical officer, when at last he was called upon to visit, advised prompt, very prompt removal. This was well; but suppose he had known of the case three weeks before—as with a better organization he would have done—the removal before infection might have saved a life or two. Here was a case for information, a case for letting poor ignorant people know how and where they might apply in such cases; showing them that they would be kindly received and helped so far as the law would allow. In this case the woman was met at the threshold of this place with the statement, “We don’t think we can help you, but we will come.” This was discouraging; a sort of snub, in fact. Happily it was not acted upon, for the officers went and got the first case out in twenty-four hours, and this same woman was so received at the Committee that she said, and no doubt repeated to her neighbours, that she would not have come had she known she would have been so *cross*-questioned. I suppose she thought it hard to let her husband die, and then that we should appear to insult her. So I thought, and I further thought the way she was received was not the way to gain the confidence and the hearts of the poor. The surgeon says it was most likely that the woman’s husband caught the disease from the people upstairs. I am sure that in all probability this was so. The law of infection, which does not usually hold longer than ten or twelve days, would tend to show that he certainly caught it within a fortnight. If this be so—and I am disposed to believe it is true—then the early removal of the people upstairs would have saved this man to his family. In eight months we have sent 253 cases of fever to the hospital. If in each case we had sought out and detected the first, or at furthest the second, case of fever among the poor, and sent them promptly to the hospital, do not you think we should have made the numbers 50 instead of 250, perhaps 30, perhaps 20? Knowing the nature of fever from a twenty-years’ parish practice, I must say I think so; and in this I follow the most able and disinterested men in my profession. If I did not know what narrow and ignorant local parish politics are in a mind or two, here and there, often unhappily busy and unhappily possessed of a sinister influence, I should be astounded at the way such intelligence is received, and at the “rows” (to use a common word) which are made to come out of it. This

question requires the most serious consideration if we desire to do our duty ; and if we can put party animosity and unworthy suspicions on one side, we may soon find our way to make the law as it stands effective, to get it amended where defective, and so serve both the poor and the payers of rates. See how this disease acts ; it may leave us for a time, but if the same causes, the same invitations, remain, it will surely come again. An ancient warrior was called “the scourge of God.” This, and like inflictions, are His scourges for people who will learn in no other way. We cannot, of course, banish all earthly sorrow, but we may mitigate and prevent much, especially among those less happily situated than ourselves. There are, of course, some things which, in the present state of our knowledge, we cannot do ; there are others we can. Common-sense tells us to dwell upon the possible, and not upon the impossible ; and yet how often, here, we dwell upon Providence as a sort of fate, and hide behind it the disease-causes we might remove. Observe the course of fever with us. In 1860 we had 27 deaths ; 1861, 25 ; 1862, 48 ; 1863, 88 ; 1864, 113 ; 1865, 128.\* Every one of these deaths represents, on the average, eight cases of fever, that is, about 3400 in this one parish, almost wholly among the poorest. What is the use of a sanitary body, or of paying large salaries, where so little note is taken of this, or where it is taken as a matter simply in the order of Providence ? Providence is in this sense only the God of lazy people. The loss of life is great, the misery is great, the demoralization is great, and let me not forget to mention that the money cost is also great. On this point a question was put to the officer, “Are fever cases very costly to the parish, both as to the cases and as to involving relief to the families, or no ?” The answer is, that it is very costly. Some are to be moved by the sense of right, of humanity ; they will easily see how this matter stands, and their hearts will give the right answer. Others appear to know the great questions of life and death only as they are costly or affect rates. This class of persons will appreciate the last answer of the Relieving Officer ; and if they cannot “rise to higher things,” they will at all events see that even to save expense and to save rates, if they really mean that, it may be well to cleanse houses, lessen overcrowding, provide people with good water, spread information among the ignorant, and so try to lessen the dreaded

\* This refers to the Vestry year which ends in March of the year named.



evils. Fever, like cholera, generally gives due warning. One case was removed from 11, Langsdowne Place, July 29th, another August 22nd; ample time for remedy if we had only known it; but the people had to take their chance, just as if no sanitary board existed, and by this apathy and want of skilled arrangements we endanger the richer as well as the poorer parishioners. It will be sure, if we allow it to nest itself and intensify, to spread over from the lower to the better habitations. I have seen it do so. This house does not appear to have had any attention until 23rd February, 1865. At this last date there was no receptacle for refuse, and there had been no water for a week. I beg you to realise the idea of no water for a week. Ten people without water except what they could beg, and the public pumps mostly removed. But then they were in some measure used to it. It is an old complaint from Scripture-readers, from inhabitants, and from casual visitors, that this locality has been more or less short of water, and of receptacles to hold it, for years past, although this sanitary body has existed here all the time. The people are stigmatised as dirty; how they could be clean without water I leave my opponents to explain. I don't think we are possessed of a miraculous power in this respect. Soon after, the back yards were found flooded, although the work had been reported as completed 23rd March, 1865. On the 21st April a chronic hole was discovered, in the water-butt, by a stranger; so that it would not have been of much use if the water had come on. After three months the butt is pronounced "all right;" which, curious as it may sound as an official entry, is the exact word in the officer's book. It appears to have taken three months to make the hole "all right." 18, Langsdowne Place, a case of fever, removed September 25th; no effectual remedy having been provided, three more cases had to be removed November 25th. Two months one would think a sufficient warning to disinfect this fever-nest. It cannot be said it was not under our notice, for the seat and riser of the closet, and the paving round the sink, were reported 5th October, 1864. Probably not much was done, for precisely the same complaint recurs 21st April, 1865, and 3rd July the house is pronounced to be in a filthy state. It took two months to put up a dust-bin here. The filthy, slow, and when slow annoying process of cleansing, often, and as no doubt intended, dis-



courages the people, and leads them to avoid all sanitary cleansing in future. 17, Henry Street, a case of fever, removed September 7th; exactly in a month another case was removed. October 5th, the house is pronounced to be in a filthy state. On the 31st "nothing done" is reported. December 1st, the work is said to be completed. Evidently, so far as we are concerned, the fever might have done what it liked with the people. There is a most vexatious drag upon us somewhere, no doubt; where it is I cannot yet make out. Every attempt to suggest improvement and to offer help is the signal for an absurd and abusive outbreak; for imputations of improper motives, for exciting personal collision, for all which, so far as I am concerned, there is not the slightest shadow of reason. Fever is not to be met with delay, with excuses, and makeshift work. It needs true men and true work, and then it goes away. 37, Langsdowne Place, August 16th, two cases of fever were removed; 29th, three cases; September 1st, two cases; September 15th, one case. Endeavour to realise eight cases in either of your own homes. I cannot find that this house was visited before the 9th March, 1865. It is now reported that there is no receptacle for refuse, and that the water-butt is in a filthy state. Little or nothing seems to have been done; but nevertheless May 9th the landlord objects to doing anything more. What had been already done is not very clear. The water-butt is now reported as in a "passable state"—that is the word. No receptacle for refuse is yet reported. One would have thought that if the two cases August 16th did not justify emptying and cleansing, that the three cases on the 29th would. I don't believe, with such evidence as we could have brought, that any magistrate in London would have refused the necessary orders. But even magistrates decide quite differently, and upon no apparent uniform plan. Public opinion must be brought to bear here, for questions are decided all sorts of ways, all over London. I believe that generally the cases are put before them in a perfunctory and slovenly manner, and too often by inferior officers, either not very wise or not very zealous. 2, Henry Street, one case of fever removed September 3rd. If the hint had been taken to empty and cleanse and whitewash, the four cases removed October 10th (six weeks after, you perceive) would probably not have occurred. On October 25th, 1864, the rev. owner had notice that the premises were in a filthy state. He was ordered to

cleanse and disinfect ; when this was done I cannot learn, but January 5th there was no dust-bin, and six months after, there was still no place to put the refuse. Ann's Place, Henry Street, November 22nd, four cases of fever removed ; December 7th, one ; December 27th, one. On 25th a notice was served upon the owner ; in seven days the work was reported "in progress ;" in four months after, the work is described as in "full progress," whatever that term may mean ; even now, it is not reported as completed ; probably it is in "fuller progress." At 11, Clarence Place, it took a month to put some hoops on a water-cask so that it might hold water, and two months to put up a dust-bin. The people, poor as they are, and ignorant as they are, must laugh at us or despise us ; or, if they have enough thought, at local representative government altogether. White Horse Yard, October 7th, one case of fever removed ; December 5th, four cases ; December 7th, one case ; December 16th, one case ; January 2nd, two cases ; January 5th, one case. This place had been visited October 5th, and an order had been given, after fourteen days' delay—a fatal delay it might be in the midst of a fever—to cleanse and lime-wash the interior of premises. It was in progress on the 31st, and was completed, so it says, December 1st. What this complete work was, we know not ; it could not, I think, have been *bonâ fide*, for on December 1st the relieving officer sent a notice, "these houses require to be emptied and cleansed ; twenty persons have been attacked with fever, and several are now ill." Three or four weeks after, the agent called and said he would empty and relet to more respectable tenants. Whether he did or not I don't know, and, as you see, the fever went on in the interval—and interval enough appears to have been allowed for it to do its worst. I may ask you as common-sense men what effective cleansing and disinfecting could in reality be done for fever patients, and their infected clothing and bedding in the house all the time ? Obstructors of sanitary improvements talk of inconvenience to people in getting them out ; can they not see in the numerous cases in this parish that it is death and widespread disease to keep them in ? The cases are but samples taken, because there were several to a house. There are plenty of others which appear to be treated upon the same happy-go-lucky principle. The creed seems pretty nearly to be, "let it alone, it will all come right in the end." The officers must not be blamed for



not doing what is clearly impossible. They cannot be everywhere, doing everything, in the time of a severe and dangerous epidemic. If the cholera should come, and in a late copy of the 'Times' a note of warning comes from the Lords of the Council, we are fully warned; we know where our worst infected spots are; *that*, we usually know by the death register; we usually wait for death, we take but little heed before, and apparently not very much after, except under a fear of popular pressure. The circular referred to is dated Privy Council Office, July 22nd, 1865, and says, "Their lordships think the disease on the decline, and do not enforce quarantine regulations, but they cannot altogether ignore the apprehension that this serious malady may visit the United Kingdom." They speak of all "epidemic disease as requiring power to be well exercised, especially among the poorer population, and therefore chiefly in the courts and alleys of towns." We are not without a record of every house visited by the disease. I say, therefore, we are fully warned, and we shall not be justified in disregarding the warning. This Vestry not long ago took upon itself, after an imperfect and not very calm deliberation, to decide that there should not be help enough. I believe the Clerk thinks we want more help in this direction. The Inspector himself tells me there is no doubt that more help is wanted for sanitary inspection. A large minority, not in any way cliqued together, think so. The Vestry will very shortly have another opportunity of recording each man his name for and against this pressing need. At present the Vestry must bear all the blame. It must not be shifted upon officers. Very speedily, if Vestries expect to continue in the confidence of the people, this policy must be altogether altered. On the whole, the salaries in this parish have been considerably raised. That of the Medical Officer of Health alone has been stinted and lowered—not that the work is less. In such a parish as this it will ever be far ahead of any one or two officers' capabilities. But is that a reason for being idle, parsimonious, and stinting help; or for idly waiting to see what Providence will do? It is notoriously the case that the parish is deficient of sanitary inspecting power, and that there is no organization to speak of for obtaining information from others. Moreover, the poor appear to be treated as troublesome if they dare to complain. I need make no further remark about this, than that it



strikes at the very root of an efficient performance of the work. I say, then, that the Vestry must be content to bear a considerable and ever-increasing amount of obloquy until it shall see fit to alter this. And in the mean time it shall be my duty to keep the Vestry conscience from going altogether to sleep. It is absurd to expect one officer, in a part only of his time, to inspect regularly and efficiently at least between two or three thousand houses inhabited by the poorest; to see that shifty agents do the work ordered; and that dirty, impudent, ignorant people do not destroy the work when done. When this is done, disease may be intercepted and life saved, but not before. You have had the evidence of the case in Webber Row before you, in a straggling, troublesome manner; it would have been far better to have waited and had it all complete, than to have had angry discussions at every stage; and it would have saved one Vestryman from committing himself by stating, before he had heard all the evidence, that it was a mare's nest. However, it suited those who wanted to dismiss the subject and disgust the Vestry to have it so, and they have had it so. The facts of the case are these. Two dissipated old people, not, it appears, in want, occupied an upper room containing about 600 cubic feet of space; it was very filthy, and the smell was very offensive. During ten days six people lived and slept here, with rather less than 100 cubic feet of space each. In a few days, as might have been expected, the old woman took, or, as I rather suppose, produced fever, for we do not trace it from anybody to this house. She laid so three weeks; then the old man took it; soon after, the daughter also, who waited on them; a week after that, a month from the first outbreak, the man below took it, and this unfortunately destroyed the provider for a wife and six children. Then two of the man's children took it. Then his wife's mother, who is also dead. Then two more of the children. This is the case which the guardian behind me called a mare's nest. On the 20th and 26th the man and woman were removed; and on the 20th the woman below stairs applied to the Vestry to have "the stench removed." The neighbours began to cry out about it. The doctor, according to the woman, said it was worse than tongue could name. The Relieving Officer said it was enough to infect the neighbourhood. The parish doctor had been asked if it would not be better for the people to go the Infirmary or Fever

Hospital than to lie there. He had recommended it, but the people would not consent, and until the woman herself stirred in the matter nothing was done; then, on her request and on Dr. Bateson's recommendation, they were removed, and at once. Since then, for the fever burnt up again, the clergyman, on behalf of his ragged school opposite, was afraid; and, as you know, wrote a letter to us. The removal, when effected, was too late, the mischief was done. No means could, I think, have been adopted, better calculated for producing and spreading a bad fever; and the question naturally occurs, as it was found practicable to remove the man within a few hours at last, why not before? In the room next to the sick (a sort of large closet on the stairs) were stowed cabbage and other refuse, and once also for about three days all the chamber discharges; and this in hot weather. The people near complained, and were about to sign a paper and send to the Vestry. After the daughter was taken away ill of fever there was no one to wait upon the sick but the woman downstairs, who did it with fear, a well-grounded fear as it turned out, having a large family. She says, "My impression is, if I had applied earlier and had had the people removed, my husband would have been alive now." That is my impression, and the doctor says, he no doubt caught it from the people above. What has been the consequence to her of the non-removal of the first cases? Her husband, who previously kept to his work, was attacked; he was suffered to remain in the house from the 26th May, and was removed not until he was within a few hours of death, on the 4th June. Talk of inconvenience in removing fever patients; one would think it was more than mere inconvenience to remove a man actually dying to an hospital miles off, especially when, as usual, it was too late in every sense. Then two of the woman's children were attacked; then the mother, an active healthy looking woman, when I saw her, she also is dead of fever. Then two more of her children, who are slowly recovering, and now one more. If, within one week or ten days of the outbreak of this fever, the house had been emptied and cleared, there is not the shadow of a doubt but that much of this misery and death might have been prevented, and the people might, after a short interval, have again, and with safety, inhabited the cleansed and disinfected house. And the same truth is applicable to multitudes of cases, here and elsewhere, and it is



applicable more or less to all epidemic and infectious diseases. It should be remarked, that almost all epidemic diseases become infectious, with overcrowding superadded upon other depressing causes. One word from Dr. Murchison, as to very late removal in cases of fever. "Removal of the patient to hospital at an advanced stage of the disease, of itself often adds to the danger. This was a point much insisted upon by the late Dr. Alison, and I have repeatedly known patients die from exhaustion, caused by their conveyance for several miles in a shaky vehicle." On the tenth day of his attack of fever the man was removed to the Fever Hospital, some miles from his home, and he died a few hours after he was admitted. There is another matter which may or may not be of importance in this case. The woman and her sister state that she must now leave the house within a few days, or have her goods seized. She owes, she says, some rent, and has lived there eight years. The agent says she owes more than £2. She and her sister both state that the agent had told her, upon the authority of our Sanitary Inspector, that she was very troublesome to the Vestry, and had brought it all on herself. The agent and the inspector both deny this. Still, whichever way the truth is, it is very unfortunate indeed that when good could have been effected, by getting the people out and cleansing the house, it was not done; and that now nine persons have been attacked and three dead, the fever all but over, and the place cleansed, that now it should be done and made to wear the appearance of a sort of revenge, because the woman who has lost both her husband and her mother dared to complain. No doubt, if this is the local impression, it will have a very bad effect upon poor people in seeking assistance in like cases. Some further remarks I have to make upon this case. However dissipated people may be, they do not from that take fever; they may have other and worse diseases, but not fever; but when they so herd together as to vitiate the air, breathing one another's breath, then, as in times of old jail mismanagement, they take fever, and they give it as well as take it. It has been tried to keep off fever with wine and nourishment, but with vitiated air it cannot be done; but with even the scantiest simple food and plenty of fresh air, you may defy fever. And this is a practical lesson for us. The parish doctor says, in his evidence, that it was about a week from the first appearance of the illness upstairs when the people were removed. He is mistaken.



The entry of first attendance at Webber Row, in the parish weekly return, is, as I am informed, the 24th April, and the man was not removed until the 20th May—the woman on the 26th—ample time for the fever to increase and extend, and, as it proved, to make a fever-nest of the house. It is the general opinion that if the fever cases upstairs had been removed very promptly the fever would not have extended. The parish doctor urged it, and, when pressed enough, effected it. The Sanitary Medical Officer urged it. The Relieving Officer says that no doubt it would be so. The woman says her husband's life would have been spared. I have no doubt that the husband of this woman, the father of six children, died the consequence of neglect. Morally, it is a case of manslaughter. I have not a clear idea against whom the verdict could be brought in the court of morals and public opinion. I feel quite clear that it is not against the officers. I don't like public bodies tacitly permitting a deficient and defective organization, and then sacrificing their officers if anything goes wrong. Provide sufficient help, give fair salaries, reverse the popular opinion that public boards have no consciences, and then, but not till then, hold the officers to the closest responsibility. All are agreed that the rooms stunk and were frightfully filthy. The evidence differs only in one degree—the slops and refuse were either removed after three days or after ten days. It matters little; one state is very little less abominable than the other. No doubt the place was altogether unfit for human habitation, and could have been proved so any time those three or four weeks. The fever was in the house on the 24th April; the Vestry had no information until the 20th May. And this is our organization after five years' experience of an epidemic fever, and between three and four thousand cases in this parish alone. When the cases were first known, one case out of the two was removed within twelve or twenty-four hours. This exonerates the Vestry officers as to that one case, but it does not exonerate the Vestry for recognising, defending, and acting upon such defective arrangements. Nor does it exonerate the Guardians. November 4th, 1863, I did myself move, impressed with the unusual continuance and prevalence of fever among us, at the Board of Guardians, the following resolution, which was, I believe, carried unanimously:—"That the Clerk write to the district Medical Officers, and request that they will be pleased to send weekly

to the Board in writing the name and address in the case of every parish patient visited at his or her own house, where, in the opinion of the Medical Officer, the bad state of the premises stands either as the cause of disease or as retarding recovery." This was acted upon for a short time, and then speedily became a dead letter. On the 6th June, 1863, impressed with the fact of increasing fever, I moved the following in your own Committee:—"That each case reported in the death register of the parish as typhus shall be specially reported upon at each meeting of this Committee, such report to comprise the condition of the premises, rooms, number of inhabitants to each room, probable causes of the fever when ascertainable, and measures taken or suggestions made for preventing the extension of the disease, and such other particulars as the Medical Officer may think necessary." Since that time you have had considerably more than one thousand cases of fever. The Committee refused to entertain my proposition, and it was never adopted; and yet see how strictly these two resolutions lie within the provisions of the law and how probably lives would have been saved by its adoption. I pressed the two resolutions upon both bodies; because I knew that a knowledge of such fever as afflicts us, and its causes, is the key to a knowledge of almost all the sanitary improvements we are empowered to carry out. The fact is, that it is a most important duty. With fair harmony between the two bodies, and the resolution of the Guardians properly carried out, scarcely anything requisite to be known could escape us. But you cannot expect officers, whose duties are altogether out of proportion with your payments for them, to take on extra and onerous duties. If the governing bodies are in earnest, let them arrange to have all needful information promptly, and pay honestly, I don't mean exorbitantly, for it. To expect work without pay from those you employ, is to own that you expect the work to be shirked, done shabbily, or altogether neglected. If we cannot mend this and similar evils, let us pray for different men, and a different mode of election; let us have a municipality of parishes, or, as soon as possible, some central and powerful court of appeal; anything rather than the vile compromise at present in the ascendant. I will not hesitate, alone if needful (but that will not be needful, for there are many good friends of the poorest here), to petition the Houses for an inquiry leading to a renovation and amendment. I know



that the leaders of both the great parties in the State are friendly to social improvement among the masses lower down.

The officers of the Guardians say they have no power to remove fever cases. If they have not, they have a wonderfully persuasive influence. They seem to have no practical inconvenience. When they thought it best to have fever cases in the workhouse, they removed them there by scores; when they thought it best to remove them to the hospital, they removed them there by hundreds. Surely, if they could be removed late, they could be removed early; and this is just where the safety lies. The difficulty and want of power are in theory; there appears to be none in practice. It appears cruel as well as costly to wait, and remove ten, when they might act at once and have only one to remove. To say nothing of removing the man at Webber Row when he was dying, after waiting fourteen days. Again, when the Medical Officer of Health saw the agent, that agent said he would cleanse the place directly we could get the people out. Did he? Nothing of the sort. The man was removed on the 20th of May, the woman on the 26th, but no cleansing was even commenced until the 4th or 5th of June. How was this? Because we have no one to look after it, and because owners and agents of such houses have learned that they can delay and excuse, and perchance slip it through altogether. And in the present scarcity of lodgings for the poor, it is at their peril that the poor people complain. Hence we want a zealous, intelligent, willing officer ever among them.

I was struck with the answer of the Relieving Officer to the last question. Does the mode of informing the Vestry at present adopted as to unwholesome places act well? Yes. Have you any suggestions to make? None. Now, as illness has been so prevalent, and wretched filthy houses may be counted by hundreds, if not thousands, in this parish—perhaps many scores visited by the Relieving Officers—you would have expected daily a great deal of information. It was quite the other way. In six months we had from twenty to twenty-three informations. Of course this is a sham, and we know it; but the word is not polite enough for general use among deliberative elected bodies. In some, if not in most of them, the form of questions, which is very elaborate, and calculated to defeat the object, is, of course, and very properly, altogether disregarded by hard-worked officers, full of other work.



This agreement with the Guardians comes, then, of course, to nothing. The order of the 4th of November for weekly returns to the Guardians, of unwholesome houses, comes to nothing. It is passing strange, that two bodies, managing nearly £50,000 annually of parish money, for public purposes, cannot agree to some *bonâ fide* plan for the general good of the parish, and for the carrying out a real sanitary improvement. A feeling is coming over the public mind, which was strongly shadowed forth in the House of Commons, approved of in plain terms by the Home Secretary, further approved of by Mr. Tite, the most influential member of the Upper Board, and which is coming forth every now and then in indignant words from the press—that the Vestries are altogether failing in the main objects of their duty, and that, so far as the usual majorities are concerned, a power for passive obstruction is uppermost. I urge this plainly and frankly before this Vestry, that here at least, and at last, we may begin to do our duty, and obtain a fair character for our dealings with our poorer neighbours. One speaker, who should know better, says it is of no use helping the class of people we are now referring to. I beg to say that to abandon even the worst and most hopeless is not Christianity. Indeed, above all others, these are the very classes it professes to take up. I don't know that the religion which we practise and exhibit on Sundays is of much use to us or anybody else, unless we can bring a little of it here, or carry it into daily life. We raise enormous sums to send its truths to the lowest of human beings afar off. I can fancy some shrewd heathen puzzling some new Colenso. I can fancy such questions put to the missionary as thus—"Is it true, sir, that in the country you come from, poor low people live by tens of thousands, in such a way that it is considered almost impossible to teach them that which you are come out here thousands of miles to teach me, and that these tens of thousands are at your very doors and close to your religious temples?" "Yes," would the missionary say; "I know of small districts, called parishes, in which ten or twenty thousand people live in filth and wretchedness, and live and sleep together without regard to age or sex, and quite contrary to the precepts of the Gospel I am now come to teach you. These people, supposed to have no sense of shame, can in no way attend even to the common necessities of the body without disregarding

the feelings of decency, which more or less prevail in all countries, Christian or heathen; and this has become so common, that within a stone's throw of some of our Christian temples we may find thousands so situated; and so common is it, that we are become callous at the sight of it, and almost hopeless of a remedy for it." The heathen might again ask,—“Does not your religion teach, as some of its strongest points, that its mission is chiefly to this class of people?” And the answer would be,—“It does.” Question again,—“Do not very great evils, quite contrary to the religion you wish to teach me, grow out of this state of daily living among your people?” Answer again,—“No doubt; and I will give you an instance or two. In our greatest and richest city, London, a report has just been read by a doctor there, which tells of the facts. Persons are said, without regard to age or sex or relationship—a few men with many women, it may be, or many women with a few men—to be living and lying down in the same small rooms; children growing up with all that comes out of this constantly before them. Another report like it has been given of another place. Other reports more than hint at the same in other districts. Another report containing hundreds of instances like it has been lately put before the great council of the nation. As one of the natural results of this, unwelcome children are born, and it is beginning to be discovered that these last are suffered to die or are killed by hundreds, and that some (it is not known how many) are killed for money. And it is also known, that where this happens, disease and death and brutality go in, and destroy the people so regularly, and so much as a matter of course, that it either passes entirely unnoticed, or is thought by some to be too bad to be mended. And as another natural result, people, however low they may be, naturally fly from these depressing and disgusting places, and seek excitement—it may be, very vicious excitement.” Question again, and last,—“Are not your chief people and religious teachers so greatly shocked at this, that they unceasingly try to amend it?” The answer might be,—“Alas! no. Small and quite insufficient attempts are made by a few; but the evil is too great to be so met. Most people who live in the better places close at hand affect not to believe it; and the few who do speak of it are mostly received as common disturbers, and rather troublesome people than otherwise.” “Enough,” the heathen would say, “tell



me no more, Brother Colenso. I and my black brother will wait ; for, as your religion tells me, the tree is known by its fruit. It is well that you should send us the great message which so many of you think the noblest in the world ; but it is not well that you should come to us until you have earnestly visited day by day all these places, and have done all that man can do and money can do to make both worlds a little better for this great multitude of people."

When we think of it closely, are we not compelled to say as this heathen is supposed to say ? And when we read the law as it is expounded to us on Sunday, and read the law we have to administer here in the week, does it not all tend to show that there is one paramount duty, which is not to be made light of, or thrown aside ? I beg to say this—we must either realise our religion and its duties, or we must give it up. Our religion as well as our social institutions are on their trial in this matter. Ministers as well as professors of religion are called upon, if they really continue in the profession of their faith, to throw their whole soul into this kind of work ; for their teachings are absolutely nothing worth to those who most need them, unless they do this. Every chief minister of a parish is *ex-officio*, in the metropolis, a member of a Vestry ; and he should make the most of his opportunity. And every other distinguished and right-minded minister should consent, nay seek, to take part in the social regeneration, which lies within the powers conferred by the Legislature upon the bodies called Vestries and upon similar bodies which do or may exist over all the country. We had better be warned in time. Some points now agitated in the political world are as to the representation of the masses. We had better try to civilise the lower millions, I think, or some day or other the brute passions which were let loose in the French Revolution may be let loose here. Placid content cannot always last with such a state of things as I am portraying here in St. George-the-Martyr, such as the Health Officers of the City and Whitechapel have reported of their districts, and such as Dr. Hunter has portrayed all over rural England. If some say (but except as an exception they say it untruly) that people are content with filth and stinks, bad water, deficient air and all their complements—soul and body complements—then I would say, that people ought not to be content. And I say, that there is

a class of men rising up, of which I am one of the humblest, who will try to interfuse their religion in their daily life, not on the day set apart only; who will agitate this question even in the very homes of the lowest. If this contentment exists, it is degrading, immoral, unchristian, and full of disease of all sorts; and it ought no longer to exist.

He concluded by moving "That a deputation of three, with the Vestry-Clerk, be appointed to wait upon the President of the Poor Law Board, and to bring before him the question of a complete efficient action between Boards of Guardians and their officers, and Sanitary Boards, Vestries, and the like bodies, and their Sanitary Officers; upon the following basis—that as almost all epidemic disease, and disease arising from local and more or less preventible causes, usually begin and spread first among the poor, and are consequently first observed by the medical and relieving officers of the Guardians, it is of the utmost importance that the earliest information of such cases should be given by the one to the other, and that the same should, if possible, in any future amendment of the Poor Law, be made obligatory; and that the Chairman and Clerk of the Board of Guardians be respectfully invited to join the deputation." And he further intimated that it was his intention to bring before the Vestry other questions in connection with the objects he had advocated.





**P.S.**—The following seems necessary to complete the story of our proceedings after this statement was made, and to show what may be expected in the way of prompt preparation from

LONDON VESTRIES.

Motion 1 (Rejected).

“That a Deputation of Three, with the Vestry Clerk, be appointed to wait upon the President of the Poor Law Board, and to bring before him the question of a complete efficient action between Boards of Guardians and Sanitary Boards, Vestries, and the like bodies, upon the following basis: That as almost all epidemic disease and disease arising from local and more or less preventible causes, usually begin and spread first among the poor, and are consequently first observed by the Medical and Relieving Officers of the Guardians, it is of the utmost importance that the earliest information of such cases should be given by the one to the other, and that the same should, if possible, in any future amendment of the Poor Law be made obligatory; and that the Chairman and Clerk of the Board of Guardians be respectfully invited to join the deputation.”

It may be observed here that it is by no means certain that the law is insufficient as it stands, and therefore the declaration here sought from the President of the Poor Law Board would be of great value.

Motion 2 (Rejected).

“That the condition and means of storage of water in the poorer Districts of this Parish being still in many instances bad, and considering the special connection there is between bad water and epidemics affecting the bowels, some competent person should be employed to inspect and report as to this matter as early as consistent with completeness may be.”

Motion 3 (Carried).

“That this Vestry, fully recognising the importance and necessity of active measures being taken to improve the sanitary condition and dwelling of the poor in this large and densely populated parish, is fully prepared, *as it has ever been*, to carry out the several provisions of ‘The Metropolis Local



Management Acts' at present existing. That it is expedient *before the next meeting of Parliament* that the Vestry should meet in committee, for the purpose of duly considering the principles of any practical alterations which it may be deemed proper to propose in the law, in order that the terms of such proposed alterations, when properly settled, may, by memorial or deputation, or both, be submitted through the Home Secretary to the Government; and the enactment thereof by Parliament if possible secured. That in order to facilitate the consideration of such suggestions as may be made, they be communicated by way of notice of motion. And that the Clerk be requested also to communicate any clauses that may appear to him necessary for the amendment of the law."

Thus, *once more*, after a like agitation and exposure we have a committee formed. The terms of the motion carried imply that the Vestry will do as it has done. The "Statement" explains what that means. The meeting of the committee will be before Parliament meets. It might have been well at once to have worked zealously under the second motion (rejected). The thought will intrude, that it may be objected to grant new powers to bodies which are almost uniformly lax in carrying out the powers they already have. If the new committee should act like its predecessor, the result will be delay and little more, until the Cholera comes upon us; then, no doubt, we shall be very active and very sorry. Then it will be, as it always has been—TOO LATE.